



Connecticut Association of Centers for Independent Living  
151 New Park Ave. Suite 106, Hartford, CT 06106  
voice 860-656-0430 fax 860-656-0496  
www.cacil.net

*...Working for the full integration, independence, and civil rights of people with disabilities  
through Centers for Independent Living*

## **Testimony of Gary Waterhouse, Executive Director**

### **CT Association of Centers for Independent Living**

**March 4, 2010**

### **Housing Committee Public Hearing**

Center for Disability Rights  
764A Campbell Ave.  
West Haven, CT 06516  
V 203-934-7077  
TDD 203-934-7079

Disabilities Network of  
Eastern CT  
238 West Town Street  
Norwich, CT 06360  
V/TDD 860-823-1898

Disability Resource Center  
of Fairfield County  
80 Ferry Boulevard  
Suite 210  
Stratford, CT 06497  
V 203-378-6977  
TDD 203-378-3248

Independence Northwest  
1183 New Haven Rd.  
Naugatuck, CT 06770  
V 203-729-3299  
TDD 203-729-1281

Independence Unlimited  
Suite D  
151 New Park Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106  
V/TDD 860-523-5021

### **H.B. No. 5372 AAC ACCESSIBLE HOUSING**

**SUPPORT-** CACIL and the disability community strongly supports a property tax exception for increased Accessibility and Visitability in new housing. We believe that three (3) features make homes more accessible to everyone.

- One (1) zero step entrance (could be through a garage)
- Wider hallways and doorways

Doorways- 32" of unobstructed passage

Hallways- 42" optimum

- One bath on the main floor with room for a wheelchair

HB 5372 will provide the incentive of a property tax exemption to developers to build ACCESSIBLE and VISITABLE housing. Municipalities would be reimbursed by a state grant in lieu of taxes.

Most existing and new housing, even in the wealthiest nations, lack basic accessible features unless the designated, immediate occupant of a home currently has a disability. However, there are some initiatives to change typical residential practices so that new homes incorporate basic access features such as zero-step entries and door widths adequate for wheelchairs to pass through.

Great Britain applies the most widespread application of home access to date. In 1999, Parliament passed Section M, an amendment to residential building regulations requiring basic access in all new homes. In the United States, the 1988 Amendments to the Fair Housing Act added people with disabilities, as well as familial status, to the classes already protected by

law from discrimination (race, color, gender, religion, creed, and country of origin). Among the protection for people with disabilities in the 1988 Amendments are seven construction requirements for all multifamily buildings of more than four units first occupied after March 13, 1991. These seven requirements are as follows:

1. An accessible building entrance on an accessible route,
2. Accessible common and public use areas,
3. Doors usable by a person in a wheelchair,
4. Accessible route into and through the dwelling unit,
5. Light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other environmental controls in accessible locations,
6. Reinforced walls in bathrooms for later installation of grab bars, and
7. Usable kitchens and bathrooms.

Access is typically defined within the limits of what a person sitting in a wheelchair is able to reach with arm movement only, with minimal shifting of the legs and torso. Lighting and thermostat controls should not be above and power outlets should not be below the reach of a person in a wheelchair.

Sinks and cooking areas typically need to be designed without cupboards below them, to permit the legs of the wheelchair user to roll underneath, and countertops may be of reduced height to accommodate a sitting rather than standing user. In some cases two food preparation areas may be combined into a single kitchen to permit both standing and wheelchair users.

In spite of these advancements, the housing types where most people in the United States reside—single-family homes—are not covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Housing Act, or any other federal law with the exception of the small percentage of publicly-funded homes impacted by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. As a result, the great majority of new single-family homes replicate the barriers in existing homes.

The broad concept of Universal Design is relevant to housing, as it is to all aspects of the built environment. Furthermore, a Visitability movement begun by grass roots disability advocates in the 1980s focuses specifically on changing construction practices in new housing. This movement, a network of interested people working in their locales, works on educating, passing laws, and spurring voluntary home access initiatives with the intention that basic access become a routine part of new home construction.